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# Letter dated 20 March 2008 from the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

I write to draw your attention to recent terrorist activity and violations carried out against Israel, as well as relevant developments in the region, in connection with the briefing and debate on the Middle East, scheduled for 25 March 2008.

**Situation along the Gaza Strip**

Since the last briefing, Qassam rocket and mortar fire by Palestinian terrorists in the Gaza Strip has escalated, causing heavy casualties and damage to the civilian population in southern towns and cities, including Sderot and Ashkelon. One civilian was killed, and countless others were injured from the more than 300 rockets — including Grad, Qassam, and mortars — fired.

In particular, from 24 February to 3 March, Hamas launched over 200 rocket attacks, at least 23 of them Iranian-made Grad rockets that hit the city of Ashkelon, a city with a population of 120,000. The Grad rockets have ranges between 20 to 40 kilometres, with a payload of 18 kg. With a longer range, larger warhead, and fragmentation on impact, a Grad rocket can cause greater damage and loss of life and injury. Hamas' upgraded capabilities now place a quarter of a million Israeli civilians in constant danger. The 122-mm Grad rockets fired at Ashkelon were manufactured in Iran and smuggled into the Gaza Strip by Hamas when the border fence between Gaza and Egypt was breached two months ago.

On 27 February, Mr. Roni Yihye, a 47-year-old father of four, was murdered by a Qassam rocket, while at Sapir College in Sderot. No less than 22 Qassam rockets were fired that day. One barrage included 11 rockets, which were launched successively in a span of five minutes.

The following day, 28 February, Hamas fired some 10 Grad rockets at Ashkelon, located 17 kilometres from the Gaza Strip. One hit an apartment building, slicing through the roof and three floors below, and another landed near a school, wounding a 17-year-old girl. Close to 90 rockets were fired by Hamas in a two-day span.

On 5 March, Palestinian terrorists fired 14 rockets into Israel. In the morning, three rockets were fired at the western Negev, and another two hit near a kibbutz south of Ashkelon.

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Though there has been a gradual decrease in rocket fire since the escalation, during the week of 4 March, 26 rocket hits were identified in Israeli territory, with more than 20 mortar shells fired at Israeli population centres. On 13 and 14 March, more than 40 Qassam rockets were fired.

Hamas terrorists still hold Corporal Gilad Shalit captive. Since he was kidnapped on 25 June 2006, Hamas has refused to allow the Red Cross or any other humanitarian agency to visit him and verify his condition. The refusal to provide details regarding Gilad Shalit's condition is greatly alarming.

As mentioned in previous letters, the smuggling of weapons, money, and other illegal munitions into the Gaza Strip continues. Hamas uses tunnels, burrowed deep beneath the ground, to move weapons into the Gaza Strip, turning the area into a launching pad for more attacks.

Israel has made clear — in words and in deeds — that it will do everything possible to ensure the humanitarian needs of all civilian populations. In contrast, Hamas cynically fires on the crossing points, forcing closures and delays, and abuses humanitarian convoys and corridors. Hamas bears sole responsibility for the escalation of violence, having turned the Gaza Strip into a stronghold of terror. Hamas is fully responsible for threatening Israeli civilians with its indiscriminate rocket attacks, as well as endangering Palestinians by launching attacks and conducting operations from within civilian areas.

From 27 February to 14 March, more than 20,000 tons of humanitarian aid and supplies entered the Gaza Strip, transported on over 1,600 trucks and fuel and oil tankers. The above data covers the period of time when Hamas greatly increased the severity and intensity of its rocket attacks. Similarly, since the Hamas takeover of the Gaza Strip in June 2007, a total of 13,144 patients have crossed into Israel for treatment. As the facts on the ground continue to demonstrate, Israel works closely with the relevant United Nations and humanitarian agencies on the ground to meet the needs of the civilian population.

**Terrorist attacks carried out against Israel**

Terrorist organizations in the region, with the backing and support of States like Iran and Syria, continue to carry out acts of violence and terrorism against Israeli civilians. My delegation has underscored time and again that Syria and Iran blatantly violate international law, specifically Security Council resolution 1373 (2001), as they host terrorist organizations within their borders. Syria serves as headquarters for numerous terrorist organizations, including Hamas and Islamic Jihad, where Khaled Mashaal and Ramadan Abdullah, their respective leaders, both reside.

Furthermore, last week, a Hamas commander said his terrorist organization had been sending fighters to Iran for training in tactics and weapons technology ever since Israel disengaged from the Gaza Strip in 2005. Others go to Syria for more basic training. "We have sent seven 'courses' of our fighters to Iran", the commander told the United Kingdom's *Sunday Times*. They first travelled to Egypt, flew to Syria, and then to Tehran. According to the commander, a further 650 Hamas fighters have trained in Syria under instructors who learned their techniques in Iran. Sixty-two are in Syria now. He said Hamas was modelling itself on Hizbullah.

The grave threat and reality posed by the extremists can be seen in the gruesome and vicious terrorist attack, carried out by a Palestinian terrorist, on 6 March, in Jerusalem. The terrorist infiltrated the Mercaz Harav yeshiva (rabbinical seminary) and opened fire on a crowded library and study hall, killing eight young men. Eleven others were wounded during the attack. This cold and callous terrorist attack took place just footsteps away from the seat of the Israeli Government and our most cherished religious, educational, and cultural institutions.

On 18 March, a rabbi at the Ateret Kohanim yeshiva was stabbed in the Old City of Jerusalem.

**Bilateral process**

As evidenced in this letter, Palestinian terrorism remains the greatest obstacle to peace and security in the region. The Palestinian leadership must stop the violence, dismantle the terrorist infrastructure, end the cycle of impunity, and bring the terrorists to justice.

Israel remains committed to the bilateral process with the moderate, legitimate Palestinian Authority leadership that embraces its responsibilities and the vision of two States living side-by-side in peace and security. Despite the escalation of terrorist rocket attacks, Israeli leaders have continued to meet with their moderate Palestinian counterparts and move forward on negotiations. The first trilateral meeting with Lieutenant General William Fraser and the Palestinian Authority and Israel took place last week. Similarly, the IDF Civil Administration hosted a one-day symposium with its Palestinian counterparts, bringing together all of the officials that coordinate civilian and defence issues between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. While Israeli and Palestinian leaders have been meeting regularly, this gathering marked the first time since 1998 that all officials involved in talks sat together.

**Situation along the Blue Line on the northern border**

My delegation wishes to underscore the importance of fully implementing Security Council resolution 1701 (2006), which changed the reality on the ground following the 2006 Second Lebanon War. The full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) has serious implications for the security and stability of the region, which was underscored in the latest report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) (S/2008/135). To this effect, my delegation hopes that the international community will continue to press for the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), and that the members of the Council will consider the report's severe findings during its deliberations. The full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) must remain a priority issue.

Yet while efforts to fully implement resolution 1701 (2006) continue, the situation along the Blue Line remains precarious. Here, I wish to refer to three core areas:

1. **Arms embargo**: Weapons continue to be transferred through the porous Syrian-Lebanese border, in violation of the arms embargo. The aforementioned report of the Secretary-General expressed concern "about ongoing reports and Hizbullah public statements that point to breaches of the arms embargo. ... All Member States in the region, in particular the

Syrian Arab Republic and the Islamic Republic of Iran, have a key responsibility in this regard. Such violations risk further destabilizing Lebanon and the whole region".

2. **Rearming of Hizbullah**: Moreover, some of these weapons are destined for areas south of the Litani River, where a rearmed Hizbullah maintains a formidable presence. As the same report noted, "Hizbullah has adapted its weaponry and tactics so as to take into account the UNIFIL presence south of the Litani River". Hizbullah is also active north of the Litani River.

3. **The two abducted Israeli soldiers**: Udi Goldwasser and Eldad Regev, kidnapped on 12 July 2006 by Hizbullah, remain held by their captors, without any sign of life given or visit by the Red Cross. Resolution 1701 (2006) is explicit in its call for the unconditional release of the Israeli soldiers, and my delegation continues to call on the Council to implement these provisions, without delay.

Israel also welcomes the efforts to demarcate the Blue Line, as well as the continuation of tripartite meetings held between the Lebanese Army, IDF and UNIFIL.

During a 10 January 2008 interview on Channel NTV, Hizbullah leader Hassan Nasrallah made clear that his terrorist organization has upgraded its military capabilities. "When I said to the Israelis that we can hit any target in occupied Palestine, I did not try to fool anybody. I am not simply carrying out psychological warfare. I am saying to the Israelis that the war will be costly", he said. The evidence on the ground, as demonstrated in the above details, and the confirmation of those activities by Hizbullah underscore the urgent need to fully implement resolution 1701 (2006).

I should be grateful if you would circulate the contents of this letter as a document to the members of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Dan **Gillerman**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative